

November 27, 2025

SENT ELECTRONICALLY

The Honourable Michael Parsa  
Minister of Children, Community and Social Services  
Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services  
7th Floor, 438 University  
Avenue Toronto, ON M5G 2K8

Dear Minister Parsa:

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the consultation to inform the new Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy (OPRS). There is an urgent need to meaningfully address poverty in Ontario. We are witnessing first-hand how deeply poverty impacts health in the Nipissing and Parry Sound Districts. Poverty, homelessness, and household food insecurity (HFI) are significant and intertwined public health issues. They are systemic, widespread, and preventable contributors to poor health. These issues heighten vulnerability to chronic diseases and mental health challenges, contribute to early adversity, limit access to health and social services, and shorten life expectancy.<sup>1-5</sup>

Far too many people are living in poverty in Ontario, placing significant strain on the health care system, the social service sector, and municipalities. During the development of our recent strategic plan, many partners expressed this concern during our community consultations. As a result, we have incorporated a strategy focused on our role in reducing poverty and homelessness within our strategic priorities.<sup>6</sup> Our responses to these issues align with community needs, complement the work undertaken by our community partners, and reflect the scope of our public health mandate.

We are presenting our recommendations for inclusion in the new OPRS, along with important data related to income, homelessness, and HFI.

### Recommendations

- Enhance the social assistance system in Ontario. Across Ontario, public health agencies monitor food affordability. This data repeatedly shows that households relying on social assistance do not have adequate income for the cost of living, including food.<sup>7</sup> Data shows that nearly 70% of households receiving social assistance experience HFI.<sup>8</sup> While many improvements are needed to strengthen the social assistance system in Ontario, several urgent recommendations include:
  - Increase Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) rates. We commend the government for recent improvements to ODSP, which have been critical to strengthening the program. However, current rates

- o do not reflect the true cost of living. Many Ontarians living with disabilities experience deep poverty, which further compromises their health.<sup>9</sup>
- o Increase Ontario Works (OW) rates, with annual increases indexed to inflation. OW rates have not increased since 2018, and this requires immediate attention given the high rates of inflation in recent years. Rates should be increased and indexed to inflation, as has been done for ODSP. OW recipients also live in deep poverty.<sup>9</sup> Food affordability data for single, unattached adults shows that these households face dire financial need, with insufficient income to pay for food and rent, let alone other necessities.<sup>7,10</sup>
- o Provide the shelter allowance to OW and ODSP recipients who are homeless. Data from the 2024 Nipissing District Point-in-Time Count shows that over 80% of people experiencing homelessness rely on OW or ODSP. High rent rates and low income were identified by respondents as the top barriers to securing housing.<sup>11</sup> Penalizing unhoused OW and ODSP recipients by withholding their shelter allowance worsens financial hardship and hinders their ability to secure housing. Addressing the inadequacy of social assistance is an essential component of reducing homelessness in Ontario.
- Continue to make improvements to minimum wage. Unless the minimum wage rate is increased, having a job is not enough to escape poverty. Although the recent increase to minimum wage was much needed, the current rate of \$17.60 falls short for the over 800,000 Ontarians earning minimum wage.<sup>12</sup> The Ontario Living Wage Network prepares annual calculations based on real costs of living across the province. In Northern Ontario, the 2025 living wage rate is \$21.10 per hour.<sup>13</sup>
- Increase funding to develop more safe and affordable housing options across the housing continuum. Housing unaffordability and homelessness are urgent issues in our region and across the province. In the Nipissing District, homelessness increased by 77% from 2021 to 2024. Furthermore, 67% of individuals experiencing homelessness were chronically homeless, meaning they lacked stable housing for six months or more in the previous year. This indicates there is no easy exit from homelessness.<sup>11</sup> Increased investment in safe, affordable housing, supportive housing, and prevention strategies, including increasing household income, are critical to ensuring people can afford housing and that experiences of homelessness are rare, brief, and non-recurring.<sup>14</sup>

- Include HFI as an indicator for the OPRS and set a target to reduce HFI and eliminate severe HFI by the end of the next OPRS cycle (2030). HFI is measured in Canada within the context of income, and HFI rates are at an all-time high since national monitoring began in 2004. Over four million Ontarians live with HFI, affecting one in four households, and one in three households with children in 2024.<sup>15</sup> HFI is a sensitive marker of material deprivation and tightly tied to household income. Severe HFI is the most extreme, meaning households are skipping meals and going without food. It is associated with the worst health outcomes and highest health care costs compared with food-secure households and those living with marginal or moderate HFI.<sup>3</sup> Research has shown that those experiencing severe HFI have more than double the health care costs of those who are food secure.<sup>16</sup> Further, they are three times as likely to be admitted to hospital for mental health disorders.<sup>17</sup> There is significant Canadian evidence about the effectiveness of strong income policy in reducing HFI,<sup>18</sup> which must be considered when weighing policy options to meaningfully reduce poverty in Ontario.

Thank you for considering our evidence-informed recommendations. We have attached several key documents from our community that highlight additional data on poverty, HFI, and homelessness. Municipalities do not have the policy levers that are available to the provincial government to achieve measurable improvements on these issues. It is critical that policies implemented under the updated OPRS are evidence-based and include ongoing evaluation. The Province of Ontario has the ability to help households struggling to make ends meet. Taking further meaningful action to reduce poverty will relieve pressure on health care, social services, and municipalities, while promoting health and prosperity in Ontario.

Sincerely,

Original signed by Dr. Zimbalatti

Carol Zimbalatti, M.D., CCFP, MPH  
Medical Officer of Health/Executive Officer

Appendices:

- Appendix A: District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board Income Resource
- Appendix B: 2024 Nipissing Pit Count Infographic
- Appendix C: Food Insecurity Factsheets

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# Nipissing District Poverty Profile



East Ferris is **20%** higher than the province and over twice the household income in Mattawa.



Real household income growth since the previous 2016 census.



The **total median household income** in Ontario is **25.5%** higher than in Nipissing District



## ONTARIO SINGLE MEDIAN INCOME

\$ 43,600

NIPISSING DISTRICT SINGLE MEDIAN INCOME

\$ 36,000

## ONTARIO LIM-AT SINGLE INCOME

\$ 26,503



OW  
Single



Nipissing



Ontario

THIS SIGNIFICANT VARIANCE HIGHLIGHTS THE DEPTH OF POVERTY FACING SOCIAL ASSISTANCE RECIPIENTS IN ONTARIO.

Annual Max Income (Basic Needs/Shelter)

Based on the Low Income Measure-After Tax, **13.0%** of persons in private households in Nipissing District are living in low income. In absolute terms, this amounts to close to **11,000** people.

Median Income 2020  
\$ 72,500

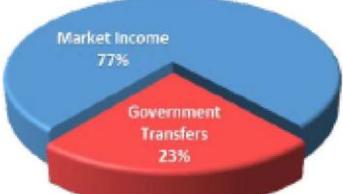
\$ 72,500

2020  
89%

2015  
73.6%

In 2020, 89% of Nipissing's population received some amount of government income, up sharply from 73.6% in 2015. This increase was mainly due to the COVID-19 pandemic emergency and recovery benefits.

## NIPISSING DISTRICT



Government transfers are **6%** higher and Market Income is **6%** lower in the Nipissing District.

## ONTARIO



The Nipissing District has one of the lowest shares of market income and highest shares of government transfers in the province.

## OW & ODSP ANNUAL INCOME COMPARISON



**5%** INCREASE IN ODSP RATES AS OF SEPT 2022



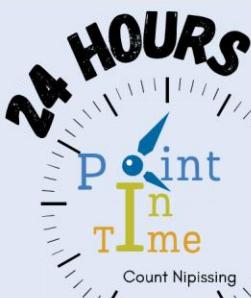
**NO** INCREASE IN OW RATES SINCE 2018



The **%** of people on social assistance in the Nipissing District is almost twice that of the province.



On Wednesday, October 9 at 8:00 am to Thursday, October 16 at 8:00 am, a Point in Time (PiT) Count and survey of homelessness was conducted across Nipissing District.



48 locations  
67 surveyors



**531**

Individuals identified as homeless

**130** (25%)  
In Emergency Shelters

**138** (26%)  
Unsheltered

**117** (22%)  
In Public Institutions

**80** (15%)  
Hidden Homeless

**66** (12%)  
Transitionally Housed



Includes **31 children** under the age of 16 identified as homeless

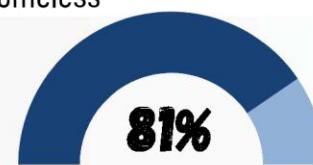
## Key Findings

Based on  
**304** Completed Surveys



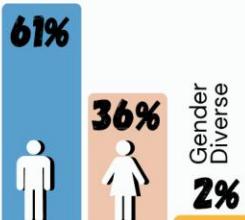
**32%**

of respondents identified as having been in foster care or a group home

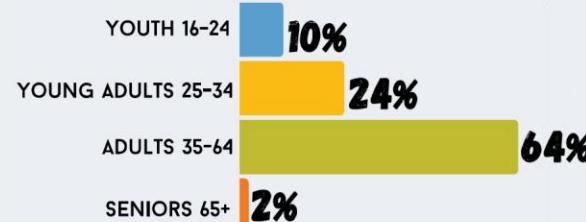


**81%**  
of respondents were single

## Gender Identity



## Age



## Veterans

**6%** of respondents identified as being a former military or RCMP member

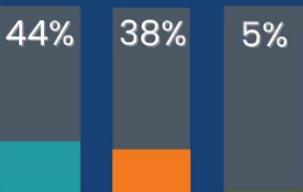


**48%**

Identify as Indigenous

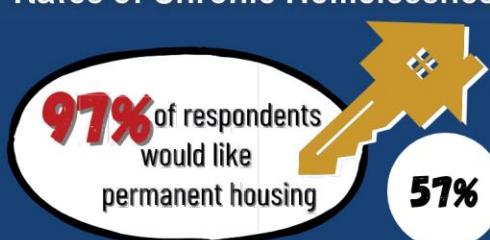
**44%** First experienced homelessness before the age of 25!

## Sources of income



Ontario Works  
ODSP  
Employment

## Rates of Chronic Homelessness



**67%**

of respondents were homeless for six months or more in the last year

**57%**

of respondents were homeless for eighteen months or more in the past three years

## Top 5 reasons for most recent housing loss

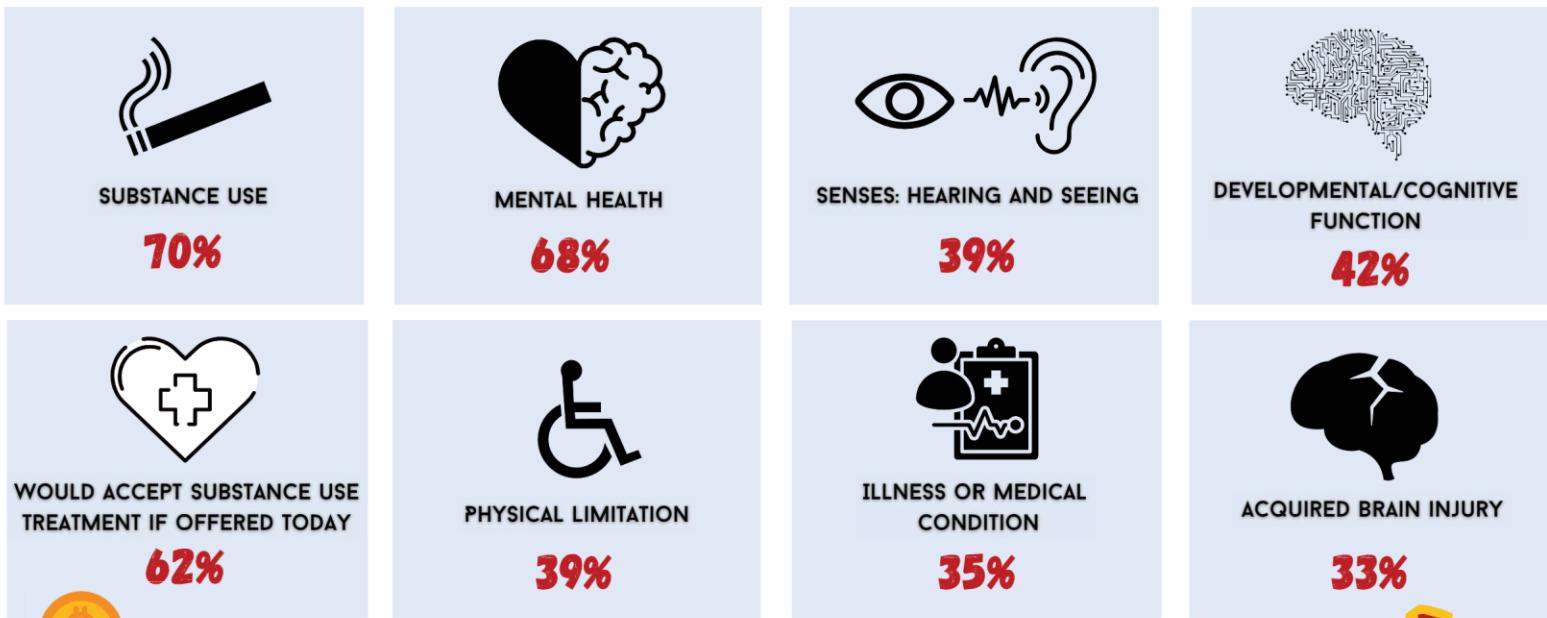
- Conflict with Landlord **22%**
- Mental Health **7%**
- Not Enough Income **21%**
- Substance Use **7%**
- Conflict with Spouse/Partner **18%**

## Top 5 barriers to finding housing

- Rent's Too High **84%**
- Addiction/Substance Use **28%**
- Low Income **75%**
- Poor Housing Condition **27%**
- Discrimination **31%**



# Health and Disability Topics of those Surveyed



 Homelessness results in significant excess health care costs and resources 

## In the last 12 months...

### EMERGENCY



**62%** of respondents had visited the emergency room

**624** visits to the E.R.



**33%** of respondents had been hospitalized

**215** times hospitalized

**1,899** days hospitalized

 “ Patients experiencing homelessness stayed in hospital twice as long, with double the costs, compared with the national average. ”

~ Homelessness Counts, 2021, Lawson Health Research Institute



**59%** of respondents had interactions with police

**1,159** police interactions (or on average, about four interactions /respondent)



**32%** one-third of respondents spent at least one day in jail

**5,773** days in jail spent by this group (or on average, 19 days in jail /respondent)



**63%** of respondents had attended a food bank

**1,626** times respondents visited the food bank in the past year



**69%** of respondents had attended a community meal

**18,196** times respondents attended community meals in the past year

## Past PiT Count Comparisons

<b>2024</b>	<b>531</b>
<b>2021</b>	<b>300</b>
<b>2020</b>	<b>293</b>



number of volunteers, geographical locations); seasonal differences/effects; and the definitions of homelessness used in the study.

 The homeless population is always difficult to enumerate, with complete accuracy. By extension, making direct comparisons between PiT Counts must always consider factors such as changes and improvements in surveying and sampling techniques: (eg. search and count locations,



# Household Food Insecurity

## North Bay Parry Sound District: 2024

**When there isn't enough money for food.**

In Canada, household food insecurity is measured in relation to income. It ranges from worrying about running out of food, to limiting food choices, to reducing food intake or going without food.

Stronger income-related policies can reduce household food insecurity.



**One in four households**  
live with household food  
insecurity in our district.

**Household food insecurity is a serious public health problem.  
It leads to increased risk of:**

### Poor Physical Health



- Diabetes
- Heart disease
- Oral health issues
- Chronic pain

### Higher Healthcare Costs



### Poor Mental Health



- Depression
- Anxiety
- Mood disorders
- Suicidal thoughts

North Bay Parry Sound District  
**Health Unit**  
Bureau de santé  
du district de North Bay-Parry Sound

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# Food Affordability

## North Bay Parry Sound District: 2024

The Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) is a survey used by public health in Ontario to estimate food costs. It includes a list of food items that follow Canada's Food Guide. The results are used to assess how affordable it is to eat well in relation to household income and local rent rates.

### How much does it cost monthly to eat well ?

#### Family of four

**\$1, 243**

Two parents 31-50 yrs  
Youth 14-18 yrs  
Child 4-8 yrs



#### Couple

**\$719**

Two people 31-50 yrs



#### Pregnant single person

19-30 yrs

**\$459**

#### Single person

31-50 yrs

**\$432**

#### Single older person

70+ yrs

**\$309**

#### Single parent with older kids

**\$927**

Parent 31-50 yrs  
Youth 14-18 yrs  
Child 4-8 yrs



#### Single parent with young kids

**\$729**

Parent 31-50 yrs  
Two children 2-4 yrs



# Is Food Affordable?

**It depends on household income.**

People relying on social assistance programs are at very high risk of living with household food insecurity. The following income scenarios show that social assistance rates in Ontario do not reflect the costs of living.

	Single Parent with Two Kids Under 17	Single Person 31- 50 yrs	Family of Four with Two Kids Under 17
	Ontario Works Monthly Income \$2692	Ontario Works Monthly Income \$895	Ontario Works Monthly Income \$2930
	Rent (2 bedroom) \$1240	Rent (bachelor) \$737	Rent (3 bedroom) \$1448
	Groceries \$927	Groceries \$432	Groceries \$1243
	Remaining \$525	Remaining <b>-\$274</b>	Remaining \$239

**Social assistance rates in Ontario are too low.**

Households who struggle to pay for food also struggle to pay for other basic costs of living, such as transportation, utilities, phone bill, clothing and personal care products. Increasing social assistance rates in Ontario can reduce household food insecurity.